



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the DSS Budget – 2/16/17

Testimony from Alyssa Goduti

CT Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA)

PLEASE DO NOT SHRED THE SAFETY NET

Good evening honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Alyssa Goduti, the President and CEO of The Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA). CCFSA is an innovative statewide network of family service agencies who work collaboratively to provide multiple programs, including the SAFETY NET Program to help families facing poverty to address their barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. We are, quite literally, **the safety net** for families who have exhausted their state benefits and are at risk of losing what little they have. **I urge you fully fund the Safety Net Services program, funded through the Safety Net and Community Services lines in the DSS budget. This is a core program to support families facing the many challenges of poverty so that they can remove obstacles to employment and become self-reliant.** The Governor's budget eliminates these lines and consolidates funding from the Safety Net and Community Services lines to the Human Service Infrastructure line, which is then reduced in total by 20%.

Last year alone the Safety Net Services Network served more than 3,200 families. A 20% reduction could mean that 644 families would not receive the vital case management, care coordination and basic needs supports to maintain stability and move towards self-sufficiency.

Please DO NOT SHRED THE SAFETY NET.

CCFSA's Safety Net Services Network is a model partnership between CCFSA, DSS and DOL, to help families who receive TANF to achieve self-reliance. We provide intensive, solution-focused case management services and care coordination that identify and reduce barriers to sustained employment. Services are home and community-based and are provided on a schedule and format that best meets the needs of clients. We approach families through a "whatever it takes" style, helping families address their barriers to self-sufficiency so that they can find hope for employment and ultimately a bright future for them and their children.

To date the SNSN has served over 24,000 families across CT and has reduced the possibility of harm or injury to over 40,000 children living in poverty. "Poverty affects children through direct material hardships such as food insecurities and hunger, inadequate clothing, lack of health care, living in overcrowded or subsidized housing or being homeless. But poverty also harms children by imposing high levels of stress on their parents, which impairs their capacity to give children the care they need to thrive."(CLASP, TANF and the First Year of Life-10/2/15). Our program helps families become self-sufficient by building on families strengths and providing them with tools on how to use these strengths to succeed in parenting, employment, and education.

Diane Manning, Chair, Board of Directors **Alyssa Goduti, MPA, President & CEO**
1310 Silas Deane Highway | Suite 219 | Wethersfield, CT 06109 | 860-571-0093 | www.ccfsa.org

PLEASE SUPPORT SAFETY NET SERVICES

Last year we provided over 12,000 home visits to more than 3200 clients. We assessed and reduced identified barriers to employment and assisted them to community resources and state services that engaged them in productive job search activities that will result in self-sufficiency. We understand that we are operating in very challenging fiscal times and the state will need to focus on funding core services. When families look to cut back their household budgets in tough times, they do not cut the items that keep them safe, strong and stable. The state cannot cut core human services that are essential to the health and well-being of our most vulnerable residents and each of your communities.

Of those families referred, our staff worked to break down barriers to assure that families are:

- Safe
- Physically and Mentally Healthy
- Free from Barriers to Self-Sufficiency
- Able to Find Employment, Education and Financial Stability

The Safety Net Services Program is funded through three separate accounts:

- DSS – Safety Net Services (for CCFS)
- DSS – Community Services
- DOL – within the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES line item)

Although it has been proven to be highly effective in helping families reduce barriers to independence, find and maintain employment, secure safe and affordable housing and access basic needs to stabilize their families, the program has been cut year after year. There is no room to cut except to reduce services to families in need. Service reductions would impact your constituents and would mean:

- Parents who are struggling will not receive the vital linkages they need to community services because this level of case management will not be an option.
- The single father who has not complied with his employment plan will have no Safety Net to catch him and will lose those vital supports and essential state benefits for his family forever.
- The mother of four who has used all of her food stamps can no longer receive basic needs supports to put food on the table.
- Families will lose their apartments because there will be nowhere to turn when they need help meeting their rent or negotiating with landlords. There will be no one to help address those barriers so that are able to focus on employment and a hopeful future.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS:

In addition to meeting our contractual goals of getting clients back into compliance so that they may continue to receive state benefits, the Safety Net Services Network provides significant

additional economic value to the state. We've embarked on initiative with the Harvard Business School Community Partners (HBS CP) to quantify this added economic value to the state.

- Earlier analysis has shown that clients enter the program with an average of 3.28 barriers to self-sufficiency. Upon exit, clients report an average of only .79 barriers.
- Analysis done with the Harvard Business demonstrates that the program has a significant Return on Investment. It helps people become self-reliant and reducing dependence on state benefits and creates economic stimulus. People move from depending on state aid to being productive taxpayers. This was demonstrated through reduction in clients receiving TANF benefits, reduction in clients receiving SNAP benefits and in earnings through new employment.

The program is managed through an innovative matrix management system, in which our family service agency members who are in local communities provide the clinicians and case management staff. CCFSA provides program management, oversight and quality assurance. This unique model helps us maximize efficiencies, share best practices and provide a consistent delivery of the model.

The Safety Net Services Program provides vital and core services, through an efficient and innovative model that has proven not only to be effective but to provide significant returns on the investment for the state. Please help protect the SAFETY NET by supporting funding in the Safety Net and Community Services line items in the DSS budget.

Safety Net Success Story (Client Perspective):

We would like to share our personal story with the Safety Net Program and LifeBridge. Our issues began months ago in the summer when I had lost my job. My wife wasn't doing well with her health and she was working to take care of our three beautiful children. We were backed up on bills and barely had enough food to eat. One week in August we lost power in our home because we couldn't pay our bills. That was one of the toughest weeks we endured. We had to make arrangements for our kids to stay with family temporarily. We were looking for help but were almost ready to give up. We were so stressed. Then we got a call from Iris from the Safety Net Program who was like an angel to us. She helped us find stability at a time when we thought we would lose it all. We feel blessed to have found this amazing program. They didn't give up on us and made it possible for us to feel better about ourselves. With the help of Iris and Safety Net, I now have a job. We will be moving into a better home. My wife and kids will be happy

and safe. From my family to all of you who make it possible at the Safety Net Program and LifeBridge, thank you so much. We are eternally grateful.

**Safety Net Success Story
(Client Perspective):**

I am writing to express my deep appreciation for the Safety Net program. The Safety Net program has benefited my family tremendously by assisting us in staying together as a family and keeping us safe in apartment. It has kept us from becoming homeless again. **It has provided us with a sense of hope in midst of tremendous financial struggles.** My significant other and I are both actively seeking employment without the assistance of this program our family as a unit would be destroyed. This program has eliminated some of the stress we are dealing with and our fear of becoming homeless. I am so grateful for this program. **If programs like the Safety Net programs did not exist there is no telling here my family would be right now.**

**Safety Net Success Story
(Client Perspective):**

“I was referred to the Safety Net program after cash assistance had ended and I was in dire straits. I had lost my job and I was worried that my son and I would be evicted from our home.”

The Safety Net program came into my life right on-time. My Case Manager gave me hope that things would be alright as long as I continued to do some footwork to address barriers and work towards successful employment. Since then, I have re-established a good relationship with my landlord and made a payment arrangement for my back rent.

I am grateful to her and to the entire Safety Net program for ‘catching me’ when I was falling. I just needed a little help to be sure that my son and I would be okay. Thank you for the work that you do.”

**Safety Net Success Story
(Client Perspective):**

Thank you for accepting me and my family of four into your Safety Net services. I am truly grateful for your kindness in helping with my electric bill. Without your services, my electricity would have been disconnected and have caused a trickle down effect of problems. Problems such as my children not being able to complete their homework. My heating services would not have worked properly due to no electricity; my HUD Housing voucher could have been taken away from me due to me not being able to provide utility service for my family.

I would also like to thank Jewish Family Services, for my case manager, Clina Dawes, who have gone a great ways to uplift my confidence as well has inspired me to see that there are endless opportunities for me in career choices. She has shown me the pathways to seek opportunities of employment as well as training that I am eligible for. I can gladly say that I am enrolled in two programs! Also I am currently in the process of completing my application to apply for educational training at the school of my choice. Thanks to Jewish Family Services and Clina Dawns, I AM ON MY WAY to a great change!

If you have questions or would like more information please contact Alyssa Goduti, President and CEO of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies at (860) 571-0093 ext. 111 or by email at agoduti@ctfsa.org.